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HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
NEWS RELEASE



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Norovirus on the Rise in Kent County**

GRAND RAPIDS - Reports of stomach illness to the Kent County Health Department have increased over the past week. In many cases, it appears individuals are suffering from norovirus, a common illness that causes stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting. Communicable Disease staff at KCHD has been in contact with local emergency departments and urgent care centers, as well as people impacted by the illness. Norovirus is highly contagious and is easily transmitted from a sick person to those who are well.

"If you or someone in your family is suffering from norovirus, avoid contact with those who have not been infected," said Adam London, acting Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. "If you work in the food service industry, in a cafeteria, or in a restaurant, and you are ill, stay home until you recover. The Michigan Food Code requires food employees to be symptom-free from diarrhea or vomiting for a minimum of 24 hours before returning to work."

Norovirus is contained in the vomit and diarrhea of an infected individual. Although a surface may not be visibly soiled, the virus can still be present and can live on this surface for long periods of time if not properly cleaned. Because of this, if possible, infected individuals should use one bathroom while uninfected individuals use another. The infected person should use disposable paper towel to dry their hands after washing, to prevent the virus from spreading. Be sure to clean that bathroom (and any other potentially contaminated areas) with a chlorine bleach solution, mixing  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach with one gallon of water.

Other tips:

1. Wash your hands before eating, after using the bathroom, and before, during and after preparing food. Rub your hands together to lather the soap, and be sure to really scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails:
  - Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds.
  - Rinse your hands well under running water.
  - Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dry them.
  - After drying, use another clean paper towel to open the door, and then dispose of it.
2. If you have been suffering from vomiting or diarrhea, remain at home until symptoms subside.
3. Don't prepare food for anyone else until you haven't had symptoms for 24 hours or more.
4. If sharing food, don't use bare hands when handling foods, and use utensils to transfer food from container to plate.

(more)

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).

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There is no medication to treat norovirus. If you suspect you have it, drink plenty of water or sports drinks that do not contain caffeine. If you feel you are suffering from severe dehydration, contact a health care provider immediately. Symptoms can be worse in young children, the elderly, or in those with weakened immune systems. For more information, check out <http://www.cdc.gov/norovirus/>.

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